

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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R 031056Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3177

INFO AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 2303

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, PINS, PFOR, VS

SUBJECT: CAO DAI ATTITUDE TOWARD US AID

1. THE DEPARTMENT WILL FIND OF INTEREST THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT FROM A MEMCON (JUST RECEIVED SAIGON) WRITTEN BY MR LAMAR M PROSSER, PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATIVE IN DALAT FOLLOWING A FEBRUARY 24 CONVERSATION WITH VENERABLE THUONG TIEN THANH, SENIOR PRIEST, CAO DAI TEMPLE IN TAY NINH.

2. BEGIN TEXT: I MENTIONED THE ACTIVITIES OF A SMALL GROUP OF BUDDHIST NUNS PROTESTING CONTINUED US ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM AND SAID WE HAD BEEN TOLD THEY DID NOT REPRESENT THE VIEN HOA DAO. HOWEVER THAT MAY BE, I CONTINUED, THOSE DISTINCTIONS WERE NEVER MADE BY THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS AND WOULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE UNITED STATES. PARA "THE CAO DAI DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT US ASSISTANCE IS THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM", HE SAID SERIOUSLY, REACHING OUT TO TOUCH ME ON THE ARM. HE BECAME RATHER EMOTIONAL AS HE CONTINUED, "WE RECOGNIZE THAT WITHOUT FOREIGN ASSISTANCE THE COUNTRY WILL FALL. WE DO NOT AGREE WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO CALL FOR AN END TO MILITARY ASSISTANCE. WE CONSIDER THIS IS A MEANS OF NATIONAL SUICIDE AND WE DO NOT ASSOCIATE OURSELVES WITH IT", HE SAID. PARA " WE HOPE THE UNITED STATES WILL CONTINUE ITS MILITARY ASSISTANCE AS LONG AS THE NORTH IS BEING SUPPORTED FROM OUTSIDE. A SUDDEN END TO US MILITARY

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SUPPORT WOULD BE A DISASTER", HE SAID. "THE CAO DIA REALIZE THE

AGGRESSION COMES FROM THE NORTH", HE SAID. PARA THEN TAKING A DIFFERENT TACK, HE SAID, "YOU HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO GIVE YOUR AID WITH CARE TO PREVENT CORRUPT OFFICIALS FROM STEALING." "THE CORRUPT ONES ARE TRAITORS", HE SAID, "WHO SELL THEMSELVES AND SELL THEIR OWN PEOPLE. THERE SHOULD BE TWO FORMS OF AID: ONE PART GOING DIRECTLY TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OTHER DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE." I POINTED OUT THAT THE US MISSION IS ALREADY DOING JUST THAT BY PASSING THE MAJORITY OF ITS SOCIAL WELFARE I.E. CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE THROUGH INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED VOLUNTEER AGENCIES. HE THOUGHT THAT WAS A BETTER SYSTEM. END TEXT.

3. COMMENT: THESE COMMENTS BY A SENIOR CAO DAI PRIEST ARE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST IN SHOWING THAT THERE ARE POWERFUL ELEMENTS IN THEE CAO DAI CHURCH WHICH TAKE ANYTHING BUT A "NEUTRAL" STAND AS BETWEEN THE GVN AND HANOI.
LEHMANN

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NNN

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